



*Laurent Dauthuille collapses across the ropes after two-fisted attack from Jake LaMotta. Jake had been waiting more than 14 rounds for this moment.*

# THE BULL'S MOMENT OF TRUTH

**By Raymond Alexander**

**Ask Jake LaMotta to pick the one fight—the few moments—in his hectic career he remembers best of all. He's got to say: the one with Laurent Dauthuille in Detroit when I saved my title in the last few seconds**

TO THOSE who didn't know him, Jake LaMotta was a surly boor who lived in an aura of suspicion. To others he was a friendly, warm-hearted man trapped in a web of pugilistic chicanery. Somewhere in between, if you could find him, was the real LaMotta. But to find the real LaMotta meant peeling back layer after layer of a brain that throbbed with resentment and pride, disillusionment and shame.

These were some of the feelings that stirred in the "Bronx Bull" on the rainy night of Sept. 13, 1950, as he strode down the aisle of Detroit's famed Olympia in his flamboyant leopard-skin robe. He was about to defend his middleweight title against a Frenchman who had beaten him 19 months earlier, before Jake had wrested the crown from Marcel Cerdan.

Shuffling in his corner, handsome, broad-shouldered Laurent Dauthuille had one thought: to avenge the defeat of his countryman Cerdan, who had since died in an airplane crash, and to take the crown back to France. LaMotta's objective was not so simple. He wanted to retain his title of course. But he also wanted a lot more—respect, adulation and, most important, he wanted to regain the integrity he had lost in his fight with Billy Fox three long, painful years before.

He had almost succeeded when he whipped Cerdan. But there were still many who viewed everything he did with scorn and contempt. The reactions all stemmed from the Fox bout. Jake had made his one grave mistake as a ringman in throwing that fight. Everybody suspected what he had done but didn't dare come right out and say so because of libel risk. LaMotta couldn't seem to live down the stigma. He was reminded of it every time he fought. Nor, in his unhappy situation, could he defend himself.

What could he say, anyway—that he had become sick of getting the runaround as the top contender and had desperately agreed to take a dive on the strength of a vaguely promised title shot? That was the bald truth of the matter—something Jake kept bottled inside him un-



**LaMotta pretended to be in trouble in the 12th and swarmed all over Laurent when the Frenchman waded in for the kill.**



**LaMotta had fought Laurent (left) once before and had refused to quit though "my eyeball was almost hanging out."**

til the 1960 Kefauver Committee hearings when he finally revealed what title-hungry torment can do to a fighter's ethics.

As shamed as he felt, LaMotta refused to let Fox knock him down. It was a matter of great pride to Jake that nobody had ever floored him. So he pretended to be dazed and defenseless and the bout was stopped in the fourth round. Because of the stench, however, Jake didn't get his title fight after all and had to battle his way back into contention.

He won his next five bouts. Then, on Feb. 21, 1949, he fought Dauthuille. Despite a badly cut eye — "my eyeball was almost hanging out"—LaMotta doggedly refused to quit. The defeat was a big setback, but the Bronx Bull wasn't giving up his title hopes. He promptly signed up to meet another Frenchman, Robert Villemain.

When Jake copped a hotly-disputed decision over Villemain, some newsmen slyly implied that the fix had been in but something had gone wrong. LaMotta boiled over the innuendoes, went on to kayo his next two opponents. Then he swung a title match with Cerdan in June of 1949.

For this privilege, he testified later, he paid \$20,000—or \$1,000 less than his purse. To even things up, Jake bet \$10,000 on

himself, winning \$16,000 after he TKO'd Marcel to become champion. The \$20,000 payoff, of course, was a deep secret at the time. At any rate, Jake's victory was still viewed in some quarters with derision. "He beat a one-armed champ," snorted his critics, referring to Cerdan's shoulder injury in the first round.

Suspicions of foul play arose when LaMotta met Villemain again and lost, though he was a big favorite. It was a savage non-title contest substituted for the Cerdan return match after Marcel was killed. But LaMotta's defeat was legitimate—he absorbed a terrible beating. "I was too sluggish," he complained, attributing his inept performance to a heavy dose of anti-histamine drugs which he had taken to ward off an oncoming cold. But few believed him.

Jake snapped back to win his next four fights, including a title bout with Tiberio Mitri of Italy. If he expected respect and adulation, all he got were boos, especially during the Mitri fight. The reason was that Jake seemed to be holding back. He explained later that he felt sorry for the "clumsy" Italian and didn't want to hit him when he was off balance. Besides, he didn't want to risk his "delicate" hands on a K.O. punch. This explanation only

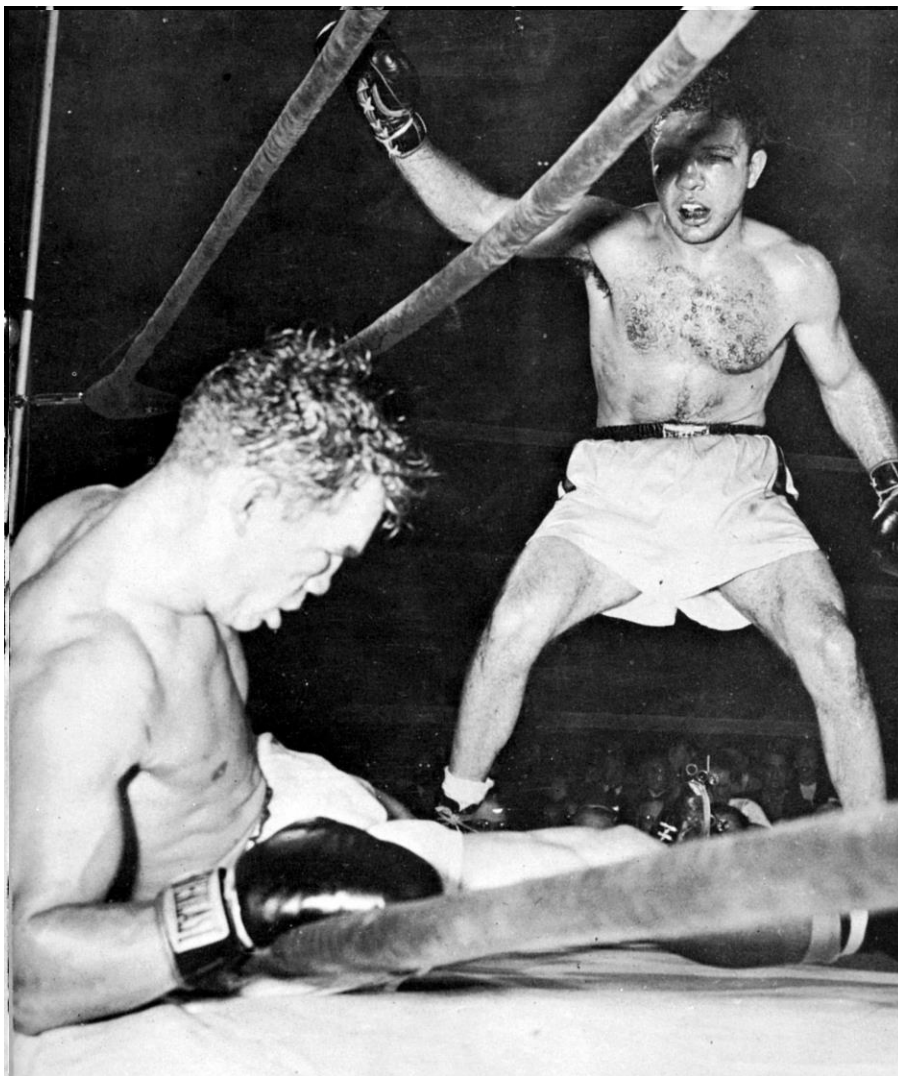
aroused his critics more.

All during this time LaMotta had been sweating bullets to make the 160-pound limit. He had fasted for 18 hours to get under the wire for his second title defense, against Laurent Dauthuille, and now, awaiting the bell, he felt weak. Jake was 29 and the weight-reducing ordeal was getting to be too much for him.

He wanted to start off fast, swarm all over the Frenchman, make up for his previous defeat by smashing Laurent with those famed LaMotta hooks. Make the crowd respect him, too. But he knew he couldn't stand the pace. So he turned boxer — to the astonishment of the fans, who had never seen him snapping those strange left jabs.

Jake was hoping for one big opening and—bam! But while he was waiting, Dauthuille peppered him with powerful jabs and sharp hooks, smartly stayed away from Jake's powerhouse right—and kept piling up a comfortable lead.

The fans were still trying to figure out LaMotta's queer fighting tactics when the 12th round came up. Jake knew he was behind and that only a knockout could save his title, so he decided to fall back on an old trick—pretend to be in trouble. His act was so effective that many fans



*Laurent gapes blankly at canvas after LaMotta battered him in fateful 15th round. Dauthuille had the fight all wrapped up until he decided to slug.*

left the arena, convinced that the end was near.

But as Laurent waded in for the kill, Jake suddenly sprang to life and unleashed a murderous barrage to the head and body. The surprised but cagey Frenchman recovered just in time and slipped away. He charged back in the 13th and 14th, with Jake still desperately looking for the big opening. Going into the fateful 15th, all Dauthuille had to do was to stay on his feet to win.

Exhausted from forcing the fight, Laurent wanted to play it safe. But suddenly the cry: "Punch! Punch! Punch!" blared from his corner and the Frenchman reluctantly tried to slug it out with the Bull. For a moment it appeared as if he might outslug the puffing Bronxite. But

Jake, scrambling to get out of a corner, frantically threw a left hook—one of the few he had tossed all night.

It exploded squarely on Laurent's jaw. The Frenchman's knees buckled and he staggered back clumsily. Jake, sensing a miracle, swarmed all over him, pumping lefts and rights like a madman. Finally, he knocked Laurent almost through the ropes. Dauthuille landed half on the apron and was counted out—just 13 seconds before the end of the round and the fight.

The arena was in an uproar. LaMotta had done the impossible and the fans forgot everything else about him but this as they cheered and stomped and whistled. The Bronx Bull, his left eye almost closed, was delirious. He danced around the ring, laughing and waving wildly to his friends.

When the tumult had died down, Jake LaMotta, "still middleweight champion of the world," smiled to himself. Winning this fight had given him the greatest feeling in the world—even greater, if possible, than the exuberance he had felt the night he beat Cerdan. Before he leaped out of the ring, he surveyed the arena. Detroit had always been his lucky town. But tonight it had brought him more than luck. It had restored the respect and dignity accorded every great champion. What more could any fighter want? ■



*It was a long-sought vindication of his honor and integrity as a fighting man . . .*